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No. 50.

MISSIONARY SUCCESS,

OR,

ENCOURAGING FEATURES

IN

THE PRESENT ASPECT OF THE TIMES AS IT RESPECTS MISSIONS.

BY THOMAS SWAN, LATE PROFESSOR AT SERAMPORE.

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It is needless to prove, that by this action our Saviour intends prayer. But see the simplicity and familiarity of *his* comparisons; and wonder not that the common people heard him gladly. Volumes have been written upon the subject of prayer: but he who spake as never man spake, comprises every thing in one word —*knock*. The allusion is to a person who wishes to excite attention, in order to obtain relief—he knocks.

Where are we to knock? "I am," says the Saviour, "the door." "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh to the Father but by me."

When are we to knock? "Morning, and evening, and noon," says David, "will I pray, and cry aloud." "Pray without ceasing," says Paul. And, says our Lord, "Men ought always to pray, and not to faint."

For *what* are we to knock? We may in every thing, by prayer and supplication, make known our requests unto God. But we are supremely to implore all spiritual blessings, because these are blessings for the soul and eternity. Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness.

How are we to knock? *Importunately*—we cannot knock too loud. Prayer is nothing, unless it be sincere and earnest. God will not regard the address we ourselves do not feel. Jacob said, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me:" and he prevailed.—How? *Perseveringly*. The Lord does not always immediately appear to our joy. "I waited patiently for the Lord," says David, "and at last he inclined his ear unto me, and heard my cry." And, "blessed," it is said, "are all they that wait for him." But though it be a good thing for a man not only to hope, but quietly to wait for the salvation of God,—it is often no easy thing. The delay is trying in itself; but circumstances may render it more so. While standing at the door, the weather may be foul; or those passing by may laugh and insult—for they are full, and have need of nothing: or, he may be weak, and ready to faint. And what, while thus exercised, can *keep* the man knocking and waiting? Nothing but a sense of his wants. They are so pressing, that he *must* succeed, or perish. Nothing, but hope. This hope may be sometimes very weak.

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BY THOMAS SWAN, LATE PROFESSOR AT SERAMPORE.*

IT must be obvious to every one who is at all interested in the prosperity of Missions, that there exists, at the present time, very generally, a disposition to depreciate the labours of missionaries, and to urge what is called a *want of success* as a reason against persevering and increased efforts to illuminate and convert the world. This want of success is spoken of every day by men who are themselves strangers to the power of true religion, and enemies to the spread of real piety—and men whom nothing would gratify less than to hear of all the wretched idolaters of India casting their idols to the moles and to the bats. The very thing that they affect to deplore, they secretly exult in; and those men, whose every effort is directed to the destruction of the kingdom of Satan and to the establishment of the kingdom of Christ, are the men whom they of all others most despise, and whose labours they least value.

Now, that more success has not attended the labours of missionaries, particularly as to the *conversion* of the heathen, is certainly to be deplored, and will be lamented by every missionary who is anxious to rescue souls from eternal destruction; and it is the duty of faithful missionaries to humble themselves before God on this account, and to search their hearts, and try their ways, to see why it is that God withholds the blessing. It

* Mr. S. was for some time Professor of Divinity in the Serampore College, Bengal, where this discourse was first delivered.

is their duty to see that their spirit and conduct are agreeable to that blessed Gospel which they wish to impart to others, and to fear lest they should themselves be stumbling-blocks in the way of the heathen, to prevent them from coming to Christ. This lies with missionaries themselves. And as they see little fruit of their labours as it respects conversions, they should be the more anxious with God in prayer for the influence of that Spirit who alone can convert the soul.

But we are not prepared to admit the idea that little or no success has attended missionary labours. On the contrary, we deny the truth of all such representations by whomsoever they may be made. It is true that nations have not been converted. But that glorious consummation could not be expected in the short period that has elapsed since missionary work began to occupy the minds of Christians in general. The effects have been quite equal to the means employed, and to the time during which these means have been in operation; and, instead of allowing our minds to sink because these effects have been so small, we should be grateful to God that they have been such as they might have been expected to be for the time; and we should take encouragement to hope for greater things, if we persevere in an humble pious manner in the good work of the Lord. There is a danger, we all know, of despising the day of small things; and enemies of the truth and false professors will always be found to do so. But let us beware. If we despise the day of small things, God may easily prevent our enjoying the day of great things, when he will pour out his Spirit in a more abundant manner, and refresh his waiting church with the conversion of thousands, and even millions. Our present object is, to select, from the present aspect of things, as to missionaries and their labours, a few features of a highly encouraging nature, the contemplation of which may counterbalance the depressing effects of the uncandid statements of ungodly men, and stimulate us to advance in our holy and honourable course with increased vigour.

1. Consider in how many places of the globe the true light is beginning to shine, where, not many years ago,

it was unmixed darkness. This must be, to every spiritual mind, an exceedingly cheering consideration. The darkness that formerly covered the earth, and the gross darkness that hung over the people, is now, to say the least, broken in upon, and broken in upon by the light of truth itself. It is true, that in most places the light is extremely feeble, when compared with the thick gloom that surrounds it—it is so feeble, that it may well be compared to a glimmering taper in a wilderness at midnight; but this need not damp our joy. We are to consider the *quality* of the element, not its *quantity*—the *nature* of the light, not its present *splendour*. It is the light of truth. If this truth be imparted only to a few minds at first, it will be imparted to a greater number of minds after that, and after them to a greater number still, increasing by a ratio much beyond what we can at present conceive, till it pervades the majority of minds in the universe. This we are certain of from the nature of the thing; and much more so from the sure word of prophecy, which assures that the light shall gradually increase—"that the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be seven-fold, as the light of seven days." *Is.* xxx. 26.

Now, what can we expect more as yet. The light has begun to spread. It has not filled the world—it has not yet shamed away all the horrid systems of error and sin;—but was that to be expected in so short a time? It must take a series of years for truth to make a universal and mighty impression; but that such an impression will be made, those who consider the nature of the truth and the promises of God cannot have the shadow of a doubt.

2. Consider the union of the people of God of all denominations in their efforts to enlighten the world, however much they may differ in points of minor importance. This is a very encouraging feature of the present times; and from this we have every reason to expect that hatred and contention will soon cease—that "Ephraim will not envy Judah, nor Judah vex Ephraim." Nothing tends more to check piety, and to prevent its increase in the souls of believers, than the

indulgence of a spirit of controversy, even although the subjects of the controversy should be the important subjects of religion; and therefore nothing can be more delightful than to see true Christians of every name leaving off their disputes, and uniting together, with all their hearts, in promoting among the sons of men, that truth by which they are all saved. In the promotion of this truth, the true watchmen on mount Zion see "eye to eye," and this is an evidence that the Lord is about to "appear in his glory to build up Zion." Those great essential truths of the Bible which shine out clearly, and which cannot but be observed by all whose minds are enlightened from above, are the objects of universal attraction, and all Christians seem anxious that these leading stars of revelation should shine upon the darkest regions of the world.

3. Consider what a vast work of Education is going on. We all know the effect of early education; and some are found to speak of the omnipotence of education, as if education could do every thing. But without going so far, we believe, in general, the truth of what was said by the wisest of men,—"Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." In good education, principles are imparted which, though they may seem ineffective at the time, and even for long afterwards, will discover their existence at some future period. The good seed which was cast into the ground may be long hid, it may lie buried during a long winter of carelessness or folly; but it will spring up again and yield a rich harvest. All missionaries seem at the present time impressed with the great importance of education, and they engage in it with energy and delight; and it is but reasonable to suppose that the effects will be according to the efforts which are made. How many thousands of children are now taught to read the scriptures whose forefathers were permitted to grow up in ignorance and sin.

4. The great increase of knowledge of different kinds, is a most encouraging feature of the present time. The time was when pious people discouraged a spirit of inquiry, seemed to think that the glorious truths

and mysteries of religion could not bear the light of philosophy, and that great knowledge and a profound sense of religion could not exist in the same individual. Those times have now passed away. The reformation of religion was the reformation of philosophy—the one advanced hand in hand with the other; and, even in the present day, the most enlightened men of science are among the most enlightened disciples of true religion. The evidence for the truth of the religion of the Bible becomes the brighter in proportion as knowledge increases—religious knowledge, as the centre, receives a tribute of light and glory from the whole circle of the sciences. Now these are the times described in prophecy; "Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased." Enlightened missionaries impart knowledge wherever they go. They increase our acquaintance with the different countries in which they reside, they enlarge the boundaries of science, and they accumulate facts and observations on character, by attending to which we obtain a deeper insight into human nature, and a better knowledge of the human mind.

5. In this wonderful age the Bible has been translated into many of the languages of the heathen, and even now the glorious work is going on. This fact itself, if no other of an encouraging nature existed, were sufficient to shed lustre on an age. The heathen, in many parts of the world, can read in their own tongues the wonderful works of God. The translation of the Bible into the language of a country, gives a permanency to the labours of a missionary that otherwise would not attach to them. It is laying a broad foundation, and it is laying it deep and firm. On that foundation a structure will rise which will gladden the mind of the missionary even when he is in heaven. The missionary will die—his many sermons and pious conversations among the heathen may be forgotten—even the effect of his holy example among them may cease to operate—but if he has left the Bible among them in their own tongue, he has left them a treasure which will never perish, and for which they will bless God through eternity—he has kindled a fire among them which all the powers of darkness shall never be able to put out.

The great work of the venerable and truly excellent Dr. Carey is his translation of the Bible into the Bengalee language. He himself considers it his great work. The translation is generally esteemed a good one. Hitherto it has been printed on very bad paper; but the worthy Dr. is now (1828) superintending a new edition of which both the type and paper are good, and which will receive his last corrections. The holy man contemplates this as his last work, and is very anxious to see it accomplished. And who would not wish and pray that he may live to do it. And who can tell the good that may be done in future ages, in India, through the instrumentality of Dr. Carey's Bengalee Bible.—Hear what God saith—"My word shall not return unto me void; but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it." Will the enemies of missions persist in their absurdity, and yet say, that no good has been done when the Bible has been given to the heathen? This is a work that should excite songs of praise in every corner of the church of Christ.

6. Consider the great improvement of European society in this country within these few years. This is an incontestable fact; and it must certainly be attributed to the effects of the labours of missionaries. At present we allude chiefly to India. Those who have lived long in this country, and have observed attentively the state of society, and have been fitted by their talents and occupations to make just observations, all agree in this, that European society in India is immensely altered for the better within these last thirty years. The evidences of this improvement are these: the system of life is in a great degree altered; profligacy and profanity are not so general; the ordinances of religion, which were generally despised, are now attended to; and we may add, Europeans are found willing to contribute of their substance to every good work. But even more glorious effects than these have followed the labours of faithful missionaries in India. Many of all ranks, who left their own happy country in a state of ignorance and sin, have been converted from the error of their ways, have devoted themselves to the service

of God, and have become auxiliaries to missionaries in the work of the Lord. Now, what can be more encouraging to those who love Zion? and what more confounding fact can you propose to the enemies of missions than this?*

Finally, Consider the value of those souls which have really been rescued from eternal death by the efforts of missionaries. This is the great point in dispute between the advocates of missions and the enemies of missions. The enemies of missions exultingly demand: "Where are your converts? how many have you converted? You have had little or no success." We reply; *Some* have been converted in different parts of the world through the labours of missionaries—*some* are even now living in the faith of the gospel—*some* have died and ascended to heaven under the influence of that happiness which the gospel only can impart. And we retort upon the enemies of missions, and demand from them a reply to our questions.—How do you estimate the value of the soul of man? Can you see no success except whole towns, cities, or countries come over *at once* to the side of Christianity? Is it of souls as souls that you speak when you talk of conversion, or by conversion do you merely mean attaching the name of Christian to nations at once, considered as political communities? Do you ever reflect on the Saviour's estimate of the value of *one* soul? Missionaries, forsooth, are to consider their labours as utterly ineffectual, because you are not satisfied with the number of converts they have obtained. But be assured missionaries will not think so, since they reckon even *one* soul more than an equivalent for all their poor labours. But few as has been the number of their converts, it has been such that they are encouraged to go on in their work with hope and joy.

* I have heard Dr. Carey say, that, when he arrived in India he could number only seven pious Europeans, of whom four or five were missionaries. But now, good men, both in the civil and military service, are to be found wherever you go. They shine as lights in the midst of the surrounding darkness, and no doubt contribute, by their holy examples as well as by their efforts, to hasten on the glorious millennial era.

Now we leave these considerations with the enemies of missions. Through missions the light of the glorious gospel of the blessed God is beginning to shine in many places of the globe where, but a few years since, all was darkness—through missions, the people of God, in general, of all denominations, have become more united in propagating the great essential truths of the Bible—through missions, a great work of education is going on—through missions, there has been an immense augmentation of all kinds of knowledge—through missions, the Bible has been translated into many of the languages of the heathen; in their own tongues they have heard of the wonderful works of God—through missions, in India, European society, within these few years, has become greatly meliorated; and, in fine, through missions, hundreds of souls have been rescued from eternal death.—Now, if these things are so, and that they are all who are in the least acquainted with the present state of the world well know, nothing can be more absurd or dangerous than to be found among the enemies of missions.

STRIKING REMARK.

That man must surely be unused to reflection, or wilfully blind, who does not behold among "the signs of the times," the wheel of a great moral revolution rolling irresistibly onward, whose velocity is increasing and must continue to increase, until the purposes of Him who gave it impulse and regulates its motion, shall have been finally and fully accomplished. The "image" has already been "smitten;" and the "Stone that was cut out of the mountain without hands" is filling the "whole earth." Who is not struck with the remarkable accordance of prophecy with the events of this age?

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But a degree of it, if it only amounts to a mere possibility, is necessary to preserve him from abandoning his suit, and saying, "What, should I wait for the Lord any longer?" More, however, is desirable and attainable: and here is enough to say to him, "Wait on the Lord, be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thy heart: wait, I say, on the Lord." Here is the *command*—"Knock." Here is the *promise*—"It shall be opened."

But how shall I plead? I knock, and long for audience—and yet I draw back, and seem afraid to be seen. For, what can I say? What does the beggar say? He is not at a loss. He knows a fine address is not necessary—it would be contemned. Yet he can express his meaning: and his wants and feelings make him eloquent. Begin, then, and say—

"Encourag'd by thy word
Of promise to the poor,
Behold, a beggar, Lord,
Waits at thy mercy's door!
No hand, no heart, O Lord, but thine,
Can help or pity wants like mine.

Yet add—

"The beggar's usual plea,
Relief from men to gain,
If offer'd unto thee,
I know thou would'st disdain;
And pleas which move thy gracious ear,
Are such as men would scorn to hear."

There are five of these pleas urged by others, which you must completely reverse.

How often does the beggar plead his former condition—"He has seen better days: and once had a sufficiency for himself and others." But this must be your language—

"I have no right to say,
That though I now am poor,
Yet once there was a day
When I possessed more:
Thou know'st that from my very birth
I've been the poorest wretch on earth."

How often does the beggar plead his innocency or goodness—"I have been reduced, not by my fault, but

my misfortune; and deserve pity rather than censure." But your language must be—

"Nor can I dare profess,
As beggars often do,
Though great is my distress,
My faults have been but few:
If thou shouldst leave my soul to starve,
It would be what I well deserve."

How often does the beggar plead the unusualness of his application—"This is not my practice: it is the first, and shall be the last time of my importuning you." But your language must be—

"'Twere folly to pretend
I never begg'd before;
Or if thou now befriend,
I'll trouble thee no more;
Thou often hast reliev'd my pain,
And often I must come again."

How often does the beggar plead the smallness of the boon—"A very little will suffice me: I ask only a trifle." But your language must be—

"Though crumbs are much too good
For such a dog as I,
No less than children's food
My soul can satisfy.
O do not frown and bid me go,
I must have all thou canst bestow."

Men, so limited are their resources, are afraid of more applications than they can relieve: and therefore enjoin the suppliant secrecy; and he promises concealment. But your language must be—

"Nor can I willing be,
Thy bounty to conceal
From others who like me,
Their wants and hunger feel:
I'll tell them of thy mercy's store,
And try to send a thousand more."